

# S2E9 Alloparenting in the Modern Era: Re-envisioning Parenting and Human Community with Dr. Darcia Narvaez

[00:00:00] **Darcia:** Throughout life, we need people who are responsive to us, who listen, who think we matter enough to be listened to and who support us. And we all need alloparents. All these components are not just for mom to do or mom and dad, it's a community support system. So the community helps with child raising, whether it's at birth, you have midwives, you have others, doulas, you have people who are there to welcome the baby, who are gonna hold the baby, who are gonna play with the baby.

With the children throughout their lives. So it's not just a family affair, it's a community affair.

[00:00:39] **Kaitlin:** I'm your host, Kaitlin Solimine, and this is the Postpartum Production Podcast. Here we hold conversations about the intersection of caregiving, creative practice, and capitalist production, as well as what it means to be producing art while also being a parent in modern society. Find out more at [00:01:00] [www dot](http://www.postpartumproduction.com).

[Postpartum production.com](http://Postpartumproduction.com) where you can also sign up for our newsletter.

Today we are talking with Dr. Darcia Narvaez, professor Emer of Psychology, and also the host of the [evolved.nest.org](http://evolved.nest.org) and president of [Kindred world.org](http://Kindredworld.org). She's a co-author of the forthcoming book, the *Evolved Nest Nature's Way of Raising Children and Creating Connected Communities* and the film [www.breakingthecyclefilm.org](http://www.breakingthecyclefilm.org).

I've known of your work for. A number of years, and now I'm realizing I don't, I'm still in the postpartum [00:02:00] fog of sorts and I don't remember where I came across the news of your new book, but it felt like such a wonderful opportunity to talk today and to dig in on the amazing spectrum of research and writing you've been doing throughout your career and how it led you to where you are now.

That's where personally, I'd really love. To potentially start, if you'd be willing to take us back, maybe a little macro level, but why you do the work you do and where you came to get to working on the evolved nest and all of the other community building that comes out of that.

[00:02:34] **Darcia:** Well, it's a bit of a long story.

It's great to be with you by the way, cuz you're interested in the same things I am. I'll make it as quick as I can. Uh, my first memory is of injustice towards a young child. And I, it, it struck me, I've always remembered it, uh, with a great sadness about what went wrong there. And I spent half my childhood in.[00:03:00]

Outside of the United States in countries where kids my age were poor and selling gum or something on the corner and rags and such. And then I would come back. So we'd be away for a year and come back for two years and then go away for a year, come back to the states and just look at the overwhelming materialism.

Mm-hmm. and waste actually, and think what's wrong with the world. My childhood has always been concerned about ethics and morality then, and it took me a while to get back to studying that because I had many interests. I was a music major in college, for example, I taught a year in the Philippines, uh, classroom music.

And I just did different things, had different careers, and maybe it was my sixth or seventh career, I found moral development as a field of study. And I thought, oh, I gotta study this. And I got my PhD in that. And at first, uh, well the dominant still perspective is, you know, all about reasoning and what you think about and your intention and [00:04:00] such, but I shortly discovered that it's not really about that because, uh, growing up I also would have frozen brain when I got on stage or something and I just freeze.

If someone asked me a question about what you think in class or whatever. And I thought about that. Well, my intent is to be moral, but if I'm frozen, there's something else going on there. So I started to read widely and found the neurobiology of mammalian development were mammals. And so we have a lot of parallels with other mammals and how the different emotion systems work.

And then I found Alan Shor's work on interpersonal neurobiology and other work describing this freeze state that I experienced myself. And I found also hunter-gatherer childhoods from anthropologists, and I realized that the stuff I had heard in graduate school about internal working models, that's what attachment is and what you think [00:05:00] about and the cognitive model you bring to a situation.

No, it's actually neurobiological. You're engraved by your experiences with your caregivers and that carries forward in your life. And that's helped me explain my frozen brain because I had been so stressed at some point that I, I, it just couldn't, my systems didn't work properly, so my morality then was affected by that.

So I wrote a book about the neurobiology of human morality, trying to figure out through the process of writing the book, what a normal brain looks like and what a stressed or species abnormal brain looks like. So we've become very abnormal in the way we raise young for our species, the ways we raise children, and then what we think is normal for kids and for adults even.

Mm-hmm. It's not normal for our species to be so self-centered and aggressive. Mm-hmm. Yeah, that's a myth. That's when you're stressed out, that's when your brain [00:06:00] isn't working very well and then you do what you can to just survive.

[00:06:04] **Kaitlin:** Well, if we could, I think that listeners will want to understand a bit more about the book you have that's coming out and about how it relates to this history of work and your personal and your professional history. Could you tell us a little bit more about the genesis of the evolved nest and how that relates to the neurobiology and all of the studies that you've been doing

[00:06:26] **Darcia:** thus far. Um, Right. So I started to integrate across fields of study, the ones I mentioned, neurobiology and developmental clinical science and anthropology and evolution.

And that's where the evolved nest came about, because we know from the anthropological studies, ethnographies all over the world, these same practices are practiced by nomadic foragers, and they represent essentially 99% of our history as a human genus, and we kind of forgot those practices. [00:07:00] When you start to force people to work, which happened about 10,000 years ago, and you don't give them the freedom to just be with their children and follow their instincts, then you end up with a lot of stressed families.

And you don't provide the nest. So the evolved nest then includes, uh, we've identified nine practices that we've studied in my lab, and those include soothing perinatal experiences. So that's, uh, supporting mother during pregnancy. Uh, the soothing birth experiences, no separation of baby from mother, and no painful procedures, no infant circumcision, for example.

And there's breastfeeding on request by the baby. The baby initiates it initially in a naturalistic birth they're able to, and that goes on for several years, from two to eight years in anthropological studies, average age of weaning of four years, we've exposed the brain in the new modern world. You know what?

But the reason is because the neurobiology, the immune [00:08:00] system takes about that long to develop two adult levels and it's shaping the jaw of the child. We have so many sleep problems and orthodontic problems now because breastfeeding has declined so much and having to breastfeed actually shapes the muscles and the way the jaw forms.

Another one is a welcoming social climate, so that includes during pregnancy, but also then after and throughout childhood and throughout life. We all need all the other practices of the nest beyond soothing perinatal experiences and breastfeeding, we all need to be welcomed and feel like we matter, like we belong.

Another one is affectionate touch, and that's what's gonna build in the early life of the vagus nerve function. It's gonna build the endocrine system like the oxytocin system properly, and you need a lot of caring and touch as a baby. You expect to be on the mom's body or the caregiver's body pretty much twenty four seven because you're born [00:09:00] so early compared to other animals, we look like fetuses till about 18 months of age, and so at least that long you need an external womb experience, which is womb with a view in the arms of the caregiver.

And then no negative touch because punishment, we know any corporal punishment, pinching, slapping, spanking, shifts trajectory of that child, and it's gonna make the child less cooperative, more self-centered, more aggressive, less empathic. Then there's self-directed free play. Which we expect all throughout our lives.

In our ancestral context, nomadic foragers, people play all throughout, all ages, play with one another. So it's multiple aged playmates, self-directed. This means not sports that are directed by adults. It's being able to run around and play chase and climb trees and be unconcerned about danger because your animal senses know what's dangerous if you're not [00:10:00] misdirected and made to feel unconfident, which we do, unfortunately, to kids.

And then there's responsive relationships. So that means in babyhood, you keep the baby calm, so you're there paying attention to the grimace on the face or the gestures that start to indicate there's something going wrong. And the baby's just

in a world of feelings, and so you have to help them get back in balance and you wanna enhance the positive and then decrease the negative emotions.

And that's what a sensitive caregiving environment provides. And throughout life, we need people who are responsive to us, who listen, who think we matter enough to be listened to and who support us. And we all need alloparents, which is another one. So all these components are not just for mom to do, or mom and dad, it's a community support system.

So the community helps with the child raising, whether it's at birth. You have a midwives, you have others, doulas. You have people who are [00:11:00] there to welcome the baby, who are gonna hold the baby, who are gonna play with the baby, with the children throughout their lives. So it's not just a family affair, it's a community affair.

And then there's nature immersion. So we are members of the Earth community and it's really important now, especially we've noticed because it's declined so much that people don't have nature connection. They don't feel like they're part of the earth. They don't feel like they love this place where they are, and that's what we need to get back to.

So, to spend time outside, you learn how to connect to the trees and the animals and plants, you feel a sense of oneness with all. And the last one is routine irregular healing practices. So in babyhood, that would be when you get unsynchronized with the caregiver. The caregiver comes back and helps you get synchronized again, and you learn then to do it yourself after a while.

And you learn how to do that in relationships. But then the community also has practices that help you [00:12:00] rebalance either in yourself, maybe you don't feel well psychologically or physically, and the community helps you rebalance. Or maybe your relationships are out of balance and you have practices that help you get back.

So in our ancestral context, we have healing routines every week, sometimes every day. So this means singing and dancing together and going to trance or different drummings in different ways. And so we need to make sure that we are doing that as well.

[00:12:40] **Kaitlin:** So obviously, I don't have a background in psychology and neurobiology. I'm coming at this as more of a layperson, a practitioner, a creative who's drawn to all of the focus of your work feels so right to me. And I

think [00:13:00] reading the Evolved Nest, especially, I just felt like this core of myself felt appeased, felt like, yes, this is, this is right.

This is what I've been missing. This is why I feel lost in early motherhood, or that I see so many of my friends and others who are mothers in this moment struggling so much. Where I still struggle, and I'd love to hear more from you, and I wanna dig in also a little bit more soon about all of these specifics like you just mentioned, but.

How do we get there? Because I feel like there's so many structural, purposefully, structurally damaging constraints to the type of care that children need, that caregivers need, and that as a result, we all need, right? That isn't about just children and their caregivers, but how that ripples across our entire society.

And I think sometimes I feel personally stuck in terms of, I can do this [00:14:00] work myself, but it's also really hard to do that work myself because I don't have the community of care, right? So if I'm nursing for a long time, or I wanna be responsive to my children's sleep at night, and I'm doing that on my own, it looks so different than what it's supposed to look like.

And in this world, especially if you're living in a nuclear family, the alternative is only paid care, right? It's turning to someone to pay them to help you in those moments versus knowing that there's a community there to support you. So I guess all that is to say like what are the next, like how do we as a society move in the direction that, I mean, ultimately it's not even going forward.

In some ways it's going backwards, right? If you look at the western mindset of progress. But to me, I guess I'm just really yearning to understand what you see on a practical side of things and yeah, how we move and regain this, this way of living and caregiving and really just existing. To me, it's not even about caregiving, it's just [00:15:00] like a way of existing in the world.

Yeah. It's such a

[00:15:02] **Darcia:** challenge today. It's unbelievable. Yeah. So, Where do we go? Well, of course, ideally we change the big structures, right? We decrease the emphasis on money making and money going to the elites all the time, and that the wealthy having 10 yachts instead of just three, so that the money can be used for what we needed for instead of that hoarding.

But meanwhile, we need to then work on our own wherever we are. And I tell people that it's, it's important to want less. We're immersed in an environment where we're advertised to and told that we should want this and that, and this and that, and more and more stuff, right? So to decrease the wants, which means get back to here and now with your children.

Now, of course, this is a challenge too, to find a smaller house or fewer things and one person staying home and not working, for [00:16:00] example, or sharing a job or things like that. All that has to be worked out on the individual level. And then finding those alloparents, those other caregivers, the people who agree with you on how to raise children with freedom and with their wellbeing in mind instead of controlling them in so many ways.

So finding that and building those communities. I think it's probably more possible in a smaller setting. In a small town, it's easier to do that. You raise a garden, you're out there in the garden with your children, and so you come back to the earth in, in essence, and we actually need to do this because we are in this so-called Anthropocene, we're about to have catastrophic climate change.

And the way to deal with that is to come back locally and do things locally instead of commuting away from home or supporting those systems that are outside of our local area. So I think there are movements to [00:17:00] localize. There's a film called Ancient Futures updated version called The Economics of Happiness, and it's all about localization.

And I think that's where we have to broaden our perspective, which is actually coming back, as you say, to what's really important for us for family wellbeing. It's being together, having meals together, growing food together, playing together. And then not being so distracted by screens. To turn off the screens, to not have so many screens, to put them aside as much as possible and be present face-to-face, especially babies need that so that they don't develop autism and other issues because they haven't gotten enough face-to-face time.

Do you

[00:17:45] **Kaitlin:** feel then that there is hope? I mean, I think I'm in a moment of feeling a bit despondent and so reading your book gave me a lot to be hopeful for, and at the same time, I guess how do we [00:18:00] move outside of, you mentioned, for example, the individual and the focus on the individual, and I think in capitalism it's very clear that everything falls on the individual right.



To be both so strong and so capable and provide in a sense, for one's family versus a collective responsibility, and I know that it takes time, and maybe it's because this might not happen in my lifetime. It may not even happen in my children's lifetimes, but those small things that hopefully are germinating into bigger movements, or do you think it takes something more revolutionary?

[00:18:37] **Darcia:** I think we have to work at multiple levels. So wherever you are as an individual, as a family, Work there. So if you have ins with the politicians and go meet with them, and then work with the groups that are trying to bring about parental leave. Paid parental leave, for heaven's sakes, right? The United States is one of the only countries in the whole world that doesn't have paid [00:19:00] parental leave. It has to do with racism that people don't wanna give those people any benefits. That's a healthcare problem too. So, there's a lot of stuff to overcome there, but I think if enough people speak up and that it also means voting and voting the people in who are pro wellbeing, And that's not necessarily the pro-life people cuz they don't necessarily think beyond certain little limited concerns they have.

It's pro wellbeing for all families and kids and adults. What's a good life? And talk to people about that. So wherever you are, you can do your part. So whether it's in church or at work, you can emphasize the Evolve Nest in different ways. We have actually a curriculum that I we're just about finished with that put out.

That has suggestions for it. It educates about what the evolved nest is and what it looks like, and then also makes suggestions for how you can apply it in your home and your [00:20:00] workplace. Mm mm

[00:20:01] **Kaitlin:** I think that's really helpful because I think oftentimes we feel so, especially in the world in which I personally live, I feel very ostracized from community.

I have ways in which I interact with the community as a whole, but I often, I think, in our caregiving, it feels siloed. And so understanding ways in which both our caregiving locally can matter, but that also ways in which to expand that outside of the home I think is really important. To come back to your book a bit, because you draw upon the lessons of a number of our animal kin. I wanted to mention, by the way, that just happenstance that recently my four year old turned to me. He was playing, just playing on his own and then he turned to me and he said, mom, Are humans, animals, and it was such a sweet little moment. Yes, yes we are. But just his little brain like putting that all together and it just reminded me, obviously, of your book, so [00:21:00] to speak to our animal nature.



I'd love to understand why you structured the book in this way and what it means to you to have done this specific work with animal knowledge and narratives.

[00:21:15] **Darcia:** Well, sometimes it's hard for people to listen and hear the evolved nest. They start to get defensive and they start to think, oh, well I didn't have that, or I didn't do that with my kids, so it must not be important. I'm not gonna listen to you.

So one of the reasons for approaching with animal nests is to try to break through that or not instigate those barriers that people sometimes put up. And to recognize that we are animals and that we share so much. So it's also about respecting animals and respecting their wellbeing.

They're people too, in other persons, according to indigenous perspectives, that we're not the only persons with agency and purpose and life ways on the [00:22:00] planet. There's all these other beings. So it's dual purpose, I suppose.

[00:22:06] **Kaitlin:** I'd love to hear from your perspective, each of the animal, if you could do like unfortunately the Cliff Notes version of some of those, or were there any particular moments, particular stories or pieces of the book that to you said Aha or you know, that you've talked about with others and have felt really resonant?

Cause I know I have my moments, but I'm curious about yours given this is your work. Yeah,

[00:22:29] **Darcia:** Well, my co-author is the animal specialist, so it was fun to work with her on this. First animal chapter is about the bear and how the bear makes decisions about whether they're going to be pregnant or not, right?

Whether to actually let the fertilized egg implant and in our own bodies as human beings to conceive, to have a sperm and egg join together. Conception doesn't mean it's pregnancy, right? Conception is just one part of it. 50% of conceptions [00:23:00] don't ever implant in the uterus, so you have to remember this.

I mean, biology is much more complicated than what we hear. So it was interesting to hear about how the bear actually makes her own decisions about that based on how well the environment is supplying for her nutrition, for example, and her anticipation of being able to care for those young. So that was, uh, quite impactful to me.

My favorite chapter though, the Wolf, I love Wolves, one of my spirit animals. And how morally committed they are to their young. And we are too, as human beings to be concerned for the wellbeing of your young, and I guess all the animals really are too in their own way because every nest is a little different.

And how, what's needed by the young to survive, but also to thrive and to move into the reproduction [00:24:00] into the next generation. So evolution is about, uh, competing rivals of your genes or whatever you have for the next few generations. So if you don't have a thriving individual, that offspring that it reproduces, if they're not thriving, they're not gonna outcompete those others who are thriving. So that's where the nest really is important, because it optimizes normal development, whether you're a whale, whether you're a bear, whether you're a beaver, whether you're a wolf, or whether you're a human being. Mm-hmm.

[00:24:37] **Kaitlin:** There's a moment in the Emperor Penguins chapter, there's a statement about self-care, and it says, caring for oneself means being able to care well for one's young. In the case of the penguin, and I thought that was really poignant and applicable to our human species as well, to maternal mortality rates, for example.

I mean, there's just [00:25:00] so much there. That resonated

[00:25:02] **Darcia:** for me and that emperor Penguin father is taking care of the egg for months while the mother who had laid the egg went off to feed and reenergize herself, right. And then come back and let the father go off for months and feed. So collaboration is how we raise our young.

It's also a

[00:25:21] **Kaitlin:** really beautiful image in the chapter in terms of the descriptions of the penguin colonies, and as I love the picture of all of the fathers nesting the eggs together and huddling together for warmth, and how important then that community literally is to their survival, because alone one would freeze.

And so that collective bodily warmth was so beautiful and such a perfect metaphor for the importance of that community structure. The other chapter that, wow, totally floored me. And I feel like I had seen this reference somewhere else, but I didn't know the specifics of it. And [00:26:00] I'd love to hear it from your perspective as well was the elephants and the example of bringing back Big five into areas where they had been hunted to extinction and

kind of recreating natural reserves for animals that had been there previously about how that impacted particular juvenile elephants who had traumas and had been removed from there. And I forget the specific term, but the elder care, if you could just speak to that, because there's something that was just, I felt, again, so applicable to what we see in our contemporary capitalist world as humans. And I was telling that story to my husband.

I've been telling to people because it's just unfathomable, I guess when you see how deeply trauma can impact and cause other species to act out that trauma in really violent ways. So yeah, if you could, I'd love to hear it from your, from your recounting rather than mine, since you know it so well. [00:27:00]

[00:27:00] **Darcia:** Well, I think you're talking about the adolescent males who correct, are left abandoned and then captured or not, and they're scheduled in their species to hang out with elder males while they're learning to be an adult.

Mm. So when they're abandoned as a young elephant and they don't have that elder care or that nurturing or that nested, they become quite violent and can be rapacious and destructive. So my co-author is the one who's done studies on this, and so they find that similarities for humans, that young men, young adolescent men, also need the elder father figure kind of person around while they're learning to be an adult.

And if they don't get that, then they can become violent and just dysregulated in the way that the elephants can become. Hmm. [00:28:00]

[00:28:00] **Kaitlin:** I was thinking there was a particular story about those adolescent elephants, I believe it was raping and killing rhinos that had been introduced to the area as well in this sort of interspecies violence that had never existed previously.

[00:28:15] **Darcia:** Yeah. And that's happening with different animals doing things that they would normally never do, but under the stressors that we've created. Same thing's happening for humans, right? That we create these strange environments for people and then they go run amok or they go a little nuts, and then we blame them instead of realizing that we've set it up.

Mm-hmm.

\*\*\*\*\*

[00:28:43] **Kaitlin:** As we've mentioned on previous podcasts here at the Postpartum Production Podcast, we like to partner with organizations who we feel like are aligned with us in mission and in vision. To that end today, we are featuring the With Her in Mind Awareness Campaign of [00:29:00] Mindful Philanthropy. Women and girls are expected to juggle competing priorities, meet demanding social and professional expectations, and often bear the burden of caregiving for multiple generations all at the same time.

These pressures contribute to the growing crisis in women and girls mental health. One in five women in the United States report facing a mental health challenge. And in 2021, 1 in 10 girls reported they attempted suicide. So why aren't we talking about it? And more importantly, why aren't we doing something about it?

With Her in Mind is a new initiative, seeking to change that by shining a light on the unique and specific mental health challenges facing women and girls. Today With Her in Mind, intends to inspire action that drives change. Learn how you can act with her in mind by visiting [www.withherinmind.org](http://www.withherinmind.org). Now back to our conversation with Darcia Narvaez.

\*\*\*\*\*

You spoke to this earlier as [00:30:00] well. I think a lot of us have been indoctrinated into this idea of violence in human society is sort of just being a part of who we are as humans. And I think in the work that you know that you do and that I read, it was sort of eye-opening for me to think about a human society that looks so dramatically different from the one that I've experienced in this era.

So I'd love to hear you speak a little bit to that, if you will, or how you've come to that. And then also I think that relates to, I've personally been really interested in epigenetics, and so understanding how all of these sort of collective traumas as a society impact us today. And I think there's been a lot.

Written more recently about, especially maternal mortality and black maternal mortality and how we carry things forward into our bodies. But yeah, I don't know if that makes sense as a question, but if those two intersect and how in your research you've confronted those questions.

[00:30:59] **Darcia:** Yeah. So for the [00:31:00] epigenetics, um, we, we can't really do epigenetic studies on human beings in terms of experiments.

So they're done on animals. For better or for worse. But we know that if, for example, if you are a rat pup in the first 10 days of life, if you don't have a nurturing mother figure, and it can be your mother or any other rat female, I mean, that's always female who's licking you a lot, which is the equivalent of being carried a lot as a baby, a human baby.

If you don't have that person, the genes that turn on to control anxiety never get turned on. And you have to take drugs to alleviate your anxiety. So when I talked to the researcher, Michael Meaney, who's instrumental in this work, he said it's the equivalent of six months of carrying of a baby, but I actually think it's 18.

So those first 18 months, again, that external womb experience, you wanna just be holding that child as much as they wanna be held [00:32:00] as much as possible to make sure the genes that are whatever scheduled to be turned on are getting turned on. Mm-hmm. So my book on the neurobiology of human morality is all about trying to figure this out.

And we know that in early life, all sorts of systems are being set up, their thresholds for how they're gonna work. When they get turned on or off, what's the set point for the normal functioning is happening. And one of them is the stress response. And if you stress a baby a lot by leaving them alone, sleep-training them to sleep alone in a crib. You are now shifting their trajectories, their thresholds for stress, and so that child is gonna be more easily stressed and when there's easily stressed, the blood flow shifts away from the higher order thinking and they're gonna go into fight. Or flight.

And if that doesn't work, then they're gonna shut down just to try to stay alive. So there's various physiological things happening. So my work [00:33:00] emphasizes how if you've raised children to be easily threatened because their stress response kicks in so easily, they'll see threat more easily than anybody else.

And they'll go into that mode easily, and they can't think very well. They're just about trying to feel safe again, and they lose their free will. They don't really have a choice. They're in that mode. And so you'll use violence, and that can be physical violence, it can be verbal violence, it can be ignoring people too, whatever, feeling like you have to be dominant.

And so then you erase the other because you have to be the number one. Or if you've learned that yelling and screaming as a baby didn't work, you had to actually shut down because otherwise you die because your system's gonna run

out of energy then you learn to shut up, you learn to withdraw. When you're with people and you're socially anxious and you're socially detached and you're more conformist in either way, [00:34:00] you're more subject to authoritarianism, whether you're the one up or you're the one down and you just, that's prehuman.

Capacities. That's survival systems. That's the stuff we're born with, and you enhance that when you stress babies. And then the stuff that's supposed to be growing, which is all this non-verbal ways of getting along with others and recognizing emotions and signaling back and forth, all the stuff that grows before language starts, that stuff doesn't grow properly.

And so you don't have many social skills to get you out of these, to get along with others. And so you end up with a person that then maybe they go to school and school tells you, just think about this and in your head to be a thinker and answer these questions and then you'll get a good grade. And so then they have the enhanced survival systems.

And then they have the intellect, which is that little thinking mind and their heart, their ability to get along and connect to others is missing. Mm-hmm. Or it's impaired because that's the stuff that was supposed to grow with [00:35:00] face-to-face, play with face-to-face love and attention and affection, all the nest components, and then it's easy to go into violence.

You can easily think about it with vicious, abstract thinking about it, imagination about viciousness and control of others. You know, we have a whole system that's set up with people in charge who think that way, right? They just want their money and they wanna make it happen and they're gonna wipe out everybody else.

Mm-hmm. So they can keep their stuff. Or you're gonna be in a more face-to-face aggression, you know, and have your gun and you have your, you know, beat your wife so that they listen to you and you're dominant and then you feel safe for the moment, but you never really feel safe, cuz you never develop that core sense of security that the Evolve Nest provides.

[00:35:55] **Kaitlin:** A little bit of a side note, but I was curious when you were talking about sleep, for example, I know you've done [00:36:00] a lot of your work in career at Notre Dame and I'm assuming have worked with James McKenna. Yes. And so I was curious what sort of role the work that he's doing, or if you could speak to that.

Cause I don't know if our listeners would. Know that much about the work that he's done, but I was curious about that intersection, given that you've been at a similar institution.

[00:36:17] **Darcia:** Yes. He has his work at the website, co-sleeping dot nd.edu. Mm-hmm. Where he discusses the research. He's done over decades of mother-child sleep, and he shows that breastfeeding moms are very careful, always aware of where their baby is as they sleep with them all night.

And that there's a co-regulation that's occurring all the time when the baby or young child is next to mother and dysregulation. Other people have shown this too. Dysregulation occurs in that child when they're away from their mother, so, which of course is not a good thing when you're constructing the brain, which is very plastic in early, in the early months and years.

And if you leave that baby alone, as I've said, you get a dysregulated person [00:37:00] and then they, they just don't ever feel well. Their physical health, their mental health, their social health is dysregulated. So his work is really instrumental in showing that co-sleeping is safe. And that the risk factors for sudden infant death syndrome, SIDS, is actually the main risk factor across all areas is infant formula use.

And then of course there's the safe sleep, safe bed sharing is what he talks about too. And he invented a new term called breast sleeping and that is what is our heritage as a species to sleep and breastfeed together, and that's what's best for mom and what's best for baby. As you were

[00:37:43] **Kaitlin:** talking, I was thinking about something you referenced earlier when you said that your work in the evolved nest sometimes can make some individuals feel defensive because when you say, well, I couldn't breastfeed, or I had to go back to work 2, 3, 6 weeks after the baby [00:38:00] was born, and so I needed to sleep train them so I could survive. I think so many mothers are pitted against each other in these obvious cultural wars of parenting paths or it's become like philosophies, right?

And I think for me what's so frustrating about that and what you're alluding to is that it's not on the individual. The individual is a victim of this system where, especially for mothers, where it all falls on the mother to be responsible for everything for the child. And so one thing I really also really appreciated in the Evolve Nest was a mention you talked about, You talked about Bowlby, you talked about attachment theory and specifically the work of Bowlby looking at the infant mother dyad, but then you moved beyond that and talked about how



yes, of course that interaction and that responsiveness is important, but that the alloparenting structure as a whole can create so many diverse, secure relationships for a [00:39:00] child.

And so not only does that infant mother bond matter, but these other bonds and also these supportive structures that allow the infant mother bond to even occur in a positive setting. Right, right. So I'd just love to hear, I know you mentioned a little bit about this at the beginning of this conversation about how the evolved nest.

As an organization is doing that, but I'd love to hear your thoughts about where we are as a society now and all of this chatter and this pitting of mothers against each other a lot of times, which is really problematic when the solution is very, very different. Again, essentially we're, we've created a problem for ourselves, so we're that we then try to solve with capitalism all the time.

So I'd love to hear more about your thoughts on that subject matter as a

[00:39:46] **Darcia:** whole. Well, it breaks my heart to hear the mom's suffering so much over their willingness or ability to take care of their children in the way they think is the best. So yeah, the evolved [00:40:00] nest is about a community commitment to the wellbeing of the child, but also the family members.

So it's not a mom only thing, as I mentioned, and I think we forget that as you said, capitalism likes to emphasize individualism. They make more money that way and more, have more control over people to make them work and for wages and all that. So I think we have to start to break out of that belief that that's the only way to be.

There are other ways that we can live together and localizing our ways of being together and having community centers and drop-in centers for parents and for kids and play parks in every neighborhood where children can go play on their own and they're not gonna arrest the parents because the kids aren't supervised.

There's so many things that have gone in the wrong direction, uh, to try to control people's behavior. Let's, uh, let's take it back.

[00:40:57] **Kaitlin:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. [00:41:00] No, I agree. I think it took me a while, even as an early mother to recognize that the onus didn't have to fall on me personally, that that frustration shouldn't be with the child or the way that

the child is responding to the system that isn't set up to support the child, that isn't set up to support me.

And some of that was very alleviating, right? Because then therefore, it's not on me to feel like there's something wrong with me or wrong with my child, but rather that my frustration should then turn to how can we reconstruct this system so that this isn't the way that we are forced to parent? Really, it does feel like a, a forced form of torture to me personally, like this, the kind of normative American parenting experience is abysmal in so many ways. Like from even the choice or not choice to get pregnant all the way through to menopause or to, you know, like whatever experience you have in your [00:42:00] body. But to me it just feels like this continuation of, of so much collective trauma,

[00:42:04] **Darcia:** um, we need to get the baby boomers back. Back into being grandparents.

Mm-hmm. Kind, compassionate grandparents and bring their communities back into nurturing, not going off to retirement and hanging out on an island or something. Come and help us. Mm-hmm. Help everybody raise their children with love. Mm-hmm. Love and action. The nest is love in action. Yeah. I mean, you

[00:42:29] **Kaitlin:** feel it.

I don't have a huge extended family myself, but I feel like even the aunties and uncles in my life who aren't biologically aunties and uncles, but are a part of my children's lives, like my children thrive when they're in their presence and care. We had a friend over who does not have children of our own, is working very hard in her own career, but just really loves being with our kids.

And I had this moment the other night when she was visiting from out of town where [00:43:00] she was just so involved with our kids and I wanted to say like, Hey, by the way, you don't have to. Do all that. Like if you wanna just sit back and have a glass of wine with me. But then I thought, wait, she actually loves this and this isn't something that she gets to do a lot.

So I'm projecting my own sort of anxieties and fears that this is gonna be too much for her. Cuz I do it a lot. I know it's a lot. But for her, there was just this little moment. And I think again to that thought of alloparenting, that when we all share that responsibility, there's so much less stress on each member and that we all do want that engagement with.

Different generations, with play. I mean, that was another novel thing in your book that I was like, whoa, we think we get to a certain age and we stop playing. And it's so sad because I can feel it in myself as I age that I'm yearning for. Just learning something new and enjoying it or joining a band, singing like, whatever it, whatever that looks like, picking up, knitting and joining a knitting club or, but, but all of those things don't work with capitalism, right?

Because that's not productive time. That's time that has [00:44:00] no purpose. I mean, there's just so much language that even goes around it where we feel like it's somehow extraneous or it's a hobby or it's extracurricular. Like all the words, even the vocabulary that we use around. What really is actually incredibly generative is really sad.

[00:44:18] **Darcia:** Music especially is so regenerative. When you sing, you hum. Mm-hmm. When you hum, your vagus nerve is getting tuned up. Mm. So just humming or just singing? I was a music teacher, so playing folk song games. I taught my college students to do that. To play them in class. That actually builds your right brain.

Your right brain can grow from playing throughout life, and that's gonna increase your empathy, your sense of connection, your higher consciousness, your flexibility. All that stuff is great. So just getting out there and moving your body and getting connected to nature, these are the kinds of things that actually lead to wellbeing.

And if you need to be, make you more productive. You also

[00:44:59] **Kaitlin:** [00:45:00] got me thinking about childbirth itself and the use of vocalizations and birth, and that makes, I didn't know that. The vagus nerve connection. So now that makes a lot of sense as to why intuitively often we need to be in certain tones. We evoking tones while we're humans in birth and labor.

Gosh, I have a million questions I could ask that are specific and broad and all sorts of things, but I'm curious if you'd be willing to divulge in terms of your personal practice and how all of this work that you're doing as a researcher professionally, how you feel like you're able to bring that to your life.

Are there certain examples or experiences you can think of in your own care work, both self-care and for your family and community and what that

[00:45:46] **Darcia:** looks like? When I was young, I wanted 20 children, but for various reasons. Yeah, I know. It's insane, isn't it? But for various reasons it never worked out for me, so I never had kids, but I feel [00:46:00] like the whole planet's kids are my concern now.

So whenever I see a child, I try to, a young child in particular to say hello or catch their eye and smile at them and encourage the parents and, and to treat them in a fun, happy way. And so I feel like that's my, whenever I'm out in the world, that's what I do. I think we have to, if we ourselves, were not nested growing up, we have to learn self calming techniques of various kinds. So vagus nerve singing, humming, helps belly breathing and just contemplating and being in nature. And so I try to do that every day to get centered again and be here in my body and love my body. It's a gift from the universe, so the universe loves us. So let it in, let that love flow, and then I'm more able then to love and be present to others in a way that is positive that enhances them whenever I meet somebody, wherever [00:47:00] I go.

So, and the other thing is the imagination. So we have to make sure to not get stuck in this us against them imagination that the news media likes to get our attention with us against them stuff or these violent things are happening and oh, what an outrage hold.

To try to not immerse and marinate in that, but marinate instead of this sense of oneness, that we're all connected and we all can help one another, and that we're all here together to make a beautiful world.

[00:47:31] **Kaitlin:** Mm, thank you. I know I personally need to hear that now, and I suspect that our listeners who often come to us because they feel the same sense that I felt in starting this podcast, which was, I know I'm going through something and it's not just me, right? That what I'm feeling in early motherhood and what I'm experiencing now, also as a creative person isn't unique to me. And I really wanted to understand [00:48:00] what that felt and looked like for others.

And so I thank you so much for the work that you're doing in providing a history in providing more access. Both intellectually but also intuitively to what we can do to live really much more whole and unified lives rather than individual stratified or disjointed lives from each other. And how I think the evolved nest really, the work that you're doing there really spoke to me because like I said early on, it just felt like something I've known but couldn't voice and so the way in which you approached this history and this knowledge that we have that we've, if we haven't lost it, right, it's there. We've just decided not to

listen to it, I guess ultimately, but I don't know if this is my, was my [00:49:00] experience of the book, but yeah, I think I really thank you for that work because I hope that it can continue to inform new ways of living and of approaching knowledge ultimately.

I mean, I think that's revolutionary of what we consider intelligence as a human species, you know? Yeah. So thank you so much. I hope that we have other opportunities to connect, and through the podcast we'll definitely be sure to share where we can find all of these resources.

Anything specific you wanna add in terms of where our listeners can find you and your work and resources that you recommend?

[00:49:37] **Darcia:** Well, the website has evolved to nest.org. The, there are a lot of resources there and links to videos and podcasts and essays and other tools for people to self calm or to pay attention to baby if they're not used to paying attention to baby 28 days and Nature Connection, 28 days, that kind of thing.

So, yes, please, uh, take advantage. It's all free. Great.

[00:49:59] **Kaitlin:** Oh, [00:50:00] wonderful. Thank you so much, Darcia. Thank you.

I'm your host, Caitlin Sony, and this is the Postpartum Production Podcast. If you like what you've heard today, please subscribe wherever you get your podcasts and give us a rating which will help us reach more listeners like you. For regular updates, visit our website, [www.postpartumproduction.com](http://www.postpartumproduction.com).

Follow us on Instagram. Postpartum Production podcast and subscribe to our CK newsletter. Thank you for listening today and being a valuable part of this community of caregivers and artists who are redefining the work that we do and pushing forward with a new system. In which art and caregiving are increasingly valued and supported.[00:51:00]